

# The Early Days of Independentism and Congregationalism in the Northern Islands of Scotland

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## ORKNEY AND SHETLAND BEFORE 1800

When the first Congregational preachers set out for the northern isles, the people of Orkney and Shetland were all nominally connected with the Church of Scotland. The Reverend John Yule of Kirkwall (1747-1792) is credited with saying "If we are right then we are all right and if we are wrong then we are all wrong".

Although the Secession had taken root in 1733 and the Relief Church in 1761 these movements had no supporters in the northern counties of Orkney and Shetland. One reason may well have been their isolation, though this has been exaggerated. It is often said, for example, that the Revolution of 1688 was not known in Shetland until six months later, but in fact the landing of William of Orange at Torbay on 5th November, 1688, was known in Lerwick by 15th December.<sup>1</sup> During the ministry of the Reverend Mr. Gray of Nesting, Shetland, in the early eighteenth century, his mode of travelling to the General Assembly was by boat to Lerwick: by smack to Hamburg: by smack to London and thence to Edinburgh by coach. It is said, too, that commissioners from Shetland to the General Assembly usually left home in August or September to travel south, spending the entire winter on the Scottish mainland and returning the following June, but the *Diary* of the Rev. John Mill, minister of Dunrossness from 1742 to 1805, shows that, while travelling was slow, uncertain and sometimes hazardous, there was no need for anything like a nine months' absence in order to attend the Assembly.<sup>2</sup> However, the remoteness of the islands and the difficulty and danger of travelling from mainland

<sup>1</sup> R. Cowie, *Shetland, Descriptive and Historical* (Aberdeen, 1871); A. C. O'Dell, *Historical Geography of the Shetland Islands* (Lerwick, 1939), 177, 296.

<sup>2</sup> Cowie, *op. cit.*; *Mill's Diary* (Scot. Hist. Soc.); cf. G. Donaldson, *Northwards by Sea* (Edinburgh, 1966), 4.

to island and across the islands by land or sea were discouraging features for anyone intent on paying them a visit. At times there were exceptions and it is on record that at different periods Orkney and Shetland have been visited by Quakers, Swedenborgians and Moravians in attempts to spread knowledge of their separate beliefs. In no case did these visits result in the gathering of supporters even although the Quaker Missionaries had penetrated and conducted services in such unlikely places as the islands of Swona and the Pentland Skerries.

Other early visitors are deserving of mention. At the General Assembly held on 17th February, 1700, an Act was passed appointing a Commission of Assembly consisting of seven ministers and one elder to visit the Presbytery of Zetland "for assisting the brethern of the said presbytery in their presbyterial work". The members of the Commission that lived "be-south Tay" were appointed to meet at Edinburgh on the first day of April to be in readiness to take their voyage and with the first fair wind thereafter to go to Zetland "and in case they shall find it convenient either to go by Caithness and Orkney or return that way. They being hereby empowered to do all things in these provinces for the good of the Church that they have by their Commission to do in Zetland". At the following Assembly on 5th March, 1701, an Act of Approbation of the actings of this Commission appears in the Assembly Records. A register of their actings, beginning upon the 18th day of April, 1700, and ending 24th June of the same year and consisting of 190 pages, "do evidence the great pains and diligence of said Commissioners and the great danger they were exposed to in their voyage by sea and likewise the fatigue they had by land in travelling to accomplish the design they were sent on . . ." The Moderator according to appointment gave them the thanks of the Assembly for their good services.<sup>1</sup>

It is far from the purpose of this paper to criticise the Established Church clergy of Orkney and Shetland in the eighteenth century. It has been suggested that they identified themselves with the upper classes; that they frequently absented themselves from their duties for considerable periods and that, as many of the churches were in a ruinous condition, the clergy accepted this as a sufficient reason for not ministering in all parts of their respective and usually extensive parishes. Many examples of the prevailing conditions are to be found in the pages of the Old Statistical Account of Scotland. In St. Andrews Parish, Orkney, the church was in a ruinous and dangerous state and St. Peter's Church in Deerness, the other under the oversight of the minister, was roofless. The two churches

<sup>1</sup> *Acts of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1843).

in the Parish of Evie and Rendal were used alternately although both had been condemned on account of their ruinous condition a number of years previously. In the united parishes of South Ronaldsay and Burray (comprising mainly two large islands) there were three churches in the minister's charge at each of which he preached one Sabbath in turn "but few of the people", he stated, "were in any event disposed to attend Divine Worship more than once in three weeks!"

In the more northerly of the islands the position was little different. On some of the islands preaching was very infrequent, and in North Ronaldsay, for instance, not more than six services per annum were held. In Shetland the large number of ancient parishes had long been combined into twelve charges, and twelve ministers were inadequate for the pastoral work of that wide area. A quotation from the *Christian Magazine* of 1797 reads, "while in some parts of Orkney there is very little of the Gospel dispensed, in other parts of it there is no Gospel dispensed at all. A number of churches have been in a ruinous state for many years and the ministers do not reckon themselves obliged to preach unless they are furnished with a church to preach in. The consequence is that many of our poorer Orcadians hear as little about our Christ in His Heaven as the inhabitants of Japan".

The conditions in the islands were considerably behind those of the mainland and it may surprise many to learn that a disease known as "leprosy" lingered in Shetland until the end of the eighteenth century, having continued in Orkney and Shetland long after it had disappeared on the mainland of Scotland. There are many references to the disease even in the last years of the century and in 1798 a Shetland leper was admitted as a patient to the Edinburgh Infirmary.<sup>1</sup>

In fairness to clergy and to medical men in the Northern Islands the conditions of travel must be reiterated and anyone who has experienced the dark bleakness of an Orkney winter even today will appreciate why many of these educated men sank into a state of apathy in their isolation from the comfort, culture, and companionship of those of similar mental training and capabilities. Until 1800 even roads were almost unknown in Orkney and Shetland and travel by land and sea must have seemed for the most part of the year singularly uninviting. In many cases, journeys between points on the same island were often made by sailing boat owing to the impassable condition of such roads as existed.

Such was the atmosphere into which the pioneers of Independency made their dramatic entry in the year 1797.

<sup>1</sup> Cowie, *op. cit.* The disease is said to have been actually elephantiasis.



## TOUR IN 1797

The visit to Orkney in 1797 of Messrs. James Alexander Haldane and John Aikman created a great sensation.<sup>1</sup> During the early years of the Congregational movement in Scotland Haldane took a leading part in its activities. Born in Dundee in 1768, Haldane was orphaned at the age of six. He was then brought up by two uncles, one of whom was Adam Duncan, later hero of the great naval battle at Camperdown. Haldane entered the East India Company in 1785 as a midshipman and officer. While in command of the *Melville Castle* Captain Haldane was called on a dark night to cope with a desperate mutiny which broke out on a sister ship of the East India fleet. "By calm and resolute determination and kindly and persuasive appeals", we are told, "he quelled the mutiny without further bloodshed".

Not until 1794 did Haldane gradually turn his thoughts to religion. At first his intention was to serve as a missionary to India but this intention was frustrated by the hostility of the East India Company. He had given up the idea of making a great fortune with the Company and returned to this country solely with the intention of purchasing an estate and becoming a country gentleman. While in Edinburgh, however, he became acquainted with Mr. David Black, minister of Lady Yester's Church, and Dr. Buchanan; then of the Canongate Church. Through these gentlemen he became interested in plans to instruct the poor and neglected people in Edinburgh and District; preaching his first sermon in May, 1797, in the schoolhouse at Gilmerton, he later preached to thousands on Calton Hill, Bruntsfield Links and King's Park.

Mr. Aikman, a native of Bo'ness, had in his early life been engaged in business in Jamaica. Here he was known as an opponent of Sabbath-breaking. Most businesses opened seven days weekly but Mr. Aikman insisted on his partners keeping separate books in order that he would not receive any of the profits drawn on Sunday. Returning to Scotland he went to study Divinity at Edinburgh University but did not complete his course and became associated with Haldane during his Sunday preachings at Gilmerton, in which Aikman also engaged.

The famous trip undertaken by Haldane and Aikman to Orkney arose from accounts which they heard of spiritual destitution in the islands in the course of a preaching tour to the north of Scotland.

<sup>1</sup> James Haldane, *Journal of a Tour thro' the North Counties of Scotland and the Orkney Isles in 1797* (Edinburgh, 1798); Haldane, *The Lives of Robert Haldane and of his brother James Alexander Haldane* (5th edn., Edinburgh, 1855).

Before leaving Edinburgh on this tour the brethren published a manifesto regarding their intentions on this missionary journey:

“The advantages of missionary schemes both in England and Scotland have remarkably appeared in extending the zeal of Christians to send the Gospel of Jesus to the dead places of the earth but also to use means to extend its influence at home. With this view a missionary journey has been undertaken to the northern parts of Scotland not to disseminate matters of doubtful disputation or to make converts to this or the other sect but to endeavour to stir up their brethren to flee from the wrath to come and not rest in an empty profession of religion. That their object may be misconstrued they have no doubt. It has already been said they are going under a design of making the people dissatisfied with their ministries but they can appeal to the great searcher of hearts that they are determined in their conversation or preaching to know nothing but Jesus Christ and Him crucified. They would therefore request that intercession should be made for them by the Church of Christ without ceasing that they may have a prosperous journey and that many who are now disobedient may be by means of them turned to the wisdom of the just and that God and all in his name may be glorified through Christ to whom be praise and dominion for ever and ever Amen.”

The expedition left Edinburgh on 12th July, 1797, in two coaches, after earnest prayer. The first meeting was held at North Queensferry, where they preached in a school to about fifty persons. Later in the day they pressed forward to Kingskettle where they arrived at 10 p.m. and preached the following morning. Having arrived at Elgin they heard that the great Lammas Market at Kirkwall would be assembled within a few days and would give them a grand opportunity of meeting large numbers of the islanders both from the Mainland and the smaller isles. This gathering in these days was the great event of the year at which large numbers of horses and cattle changed hands and many types of goods were exposed for sale.

On 11th August, 1797, the brethren left Elgin for Burghead to embark by boat for Orkney, and sailed with a fair wind. They preached on board the boat and the crew listened with much attention and frequently attended the services afterwards during their stay in Orkney. On arriving at Kirkwall on the following day they were taken care of by Bailie Jamieson of that town, described as a “friend of the truth”. Mr. Jamieson was a merchant who later rose to be Provost in 1812.<sup>1</sup> His interest in the

<sup>1</sup> Kirkwall Burgh Records.

Congregational Church continued, for he was one of the guarantors when the first manse was built in Queen Street some years later. The first service of the campaign was conducted at half past six in the evening after intimation by a bell and was held in the Parish Close. Here Aikman preached to a congregation of about 800 persons. This square is bounded on three sides by St. Magnus' Cathedral, the Earl's Palace, and the Bishop's Palace; and as a site for preaching was more comfortable for the audiences in this windswept area than most other open air sites available. Next day Aikman preached here at several gatherings of between 1,200 and 3,000 people. Hearing that the minister at Shapinsay had been absent for a considerable time since going down to the General Assembly some months before, Mr. Haldane crossed there and preached twice by the seashore to congregations comprising most of the population. During this visit he had a conversation with a man of 92, born in the reign of Queen Anne and now confined to bed. The man confessed his lifelong ignorance of most things concerning the Gospel and was later visited on several occasions during the campaign until his death. This incident made a profound impression on Haldane which he often publicly referred to in after life. During the stay of sixteen days in Orkney Haldane took the islands to the east and Mr. Aikman the islands to the west of the mainland. In all they preached no less than fifty-five times and amongst other points visited were Stromness, Rendal, Evie, Egilsay, Rousay, Eday, Sanday, Deerness, Tankerness and North Ronaldshay.

In most places the services were attended by practically all the inhabitants. For instance, in Sanday a crowd of 750 assembled and the highest numbers addressed at Kirkwall during the Lammas Fair amounted to between three and four thousand persons on weekdays and to more than six thousand on Sundays. In fact, it is stated that the preaching emptied the Fair. In the journal regarding the tour it is stated: "It becomes us here to remark the kindness of God to us both in crossing the different firths and during the whole of our stay in Orkney, having never once been incommoded while preaching with rain although sometimes the clouds had a lowering aspect". To anyone acquainted with Orkney weather these circumstances truly were remarkable. In view of the general indifference of the Church of Scotland ministers to these visitors it is fair to say that they were received courteously at Stromness by the minister, Mr. Hamilton, and his wife.

#### VISIT TO SHETLAND

Two years later Mr. Haldane, who by now had been ordained by a group of Independent Ministers on 3rd February, 1799, and Mr. Aikman



left along with Reverend Wm. Innes for a further tour in the north with the intention of visiting Shetland. Mr. Aikman, however, became unwell and had to remain at Kirkwall but Haldane and Innes carried on, and 10th July, 1799, saw them preach the first sermon heard in the Fair Isle for six years. From there they embarked in an open boat and were out all night in heavy rain. Arriving on the Shetland mainland they were received with hospitality by a gentleman named Ogilvie and commenced their preaching in barns. The first Sunday was spent in Lerwick, where they found that the people had so little connection with Scotland that a respectable woman living there asked if Edinburgh was as large as Lerwick! After preaching in Nesting they then visited the islands of Whalsay, Skerries, Fetlar, Unst and Yell. The Reverend Mr. Mill of Dunrossness, then aged 88, gave James Haldane his church to preach in and after the service stood up and in a commanding tone ordered the people to take heed of the words they heard, more especially as this visit was a new and unheard of occurrence in their history. Later Haldane and Innes separated and the former penetrated to the distant island of Foula before rejoining his colleague at Scalloway.

Arrived again in Lerwick, the brethren spent five days preaching each day in the town and neighbouring country. They were very hospitably received both by gentry and ministers except on one occasion. Having landed one afternoon, weary and famished, at an island where only one respectable house could be seen, they hoped there to find a cordial welcome; instead they were coldly and brusquely informed that the people of the island had no need of more preaching than the occasional services available. On hearing this the brethren withdrew and preached on the seashore. At night Haldane and Innes lodged in a primitive fisherman's hut where they were provided with salt herring and oatcake for their supper and the floor for their bed. Strangely enough this incident had the effect of greatly increasing the interest and hospitality of Shetlanders throughout the islands, who sought to erase the stain which all felt had been cast on their insular hospitality.

From Lerwick visits were paid to Dunrossness, Cunningsburgh, Sandwick and Bigton. These services frequently were conducted on the beach, but many parish ministers lent their churches. On 18th August the six weeks' tour was completed. "People were often affected," wrote Haldane, "and it is hoped that lasting impressions have in some instances been made."

Haldane and Innes had an exciting journey after their departure, in a six-oared boat belonging to the Commissioners of the Northern Fisheries. Hoping to reach the Fair Isle before dark and to cross over to Orkney in

the morning, so as to arrive in Kirkwall in time for the Lammas Market, they found the swell of the sea to be so heavy and the embarkation so difficult that the wives of the boatmen begged their husbands not to proceed. Having set out, however, the night overtook them and they missed Fair Isle in the dark. The boatmen became uneasy and James Haldane himself took the helm and, guided by the stars, steered for North Ronaldsay. In the dim light of dawn, land at last was sighted, and the party was steered into Sanday after a trip of 54 miles. The missionaries retired to bed but the boatmen were determined to return at once to Shetland. Haldane was called up in order to pay for the hire and the boatmen set out contrary to his advice, as the weather was unfavourable and the currents dangerous. The result was that they were carried out of their course away to the north-east of Scotland, where they were picked up by a coasting vessel at the mouth of the Moray Firth. Such was their panic that they lost all presence of mind and on boarding the coaster failed to make fast their boat, so that it drifted away and was lost.

On reaching Orkney, Haldane and Innes joined Aikman, and on this occasion, after preaching morning and evening during the Fair, left for the South Isles of Walls, South Ronaldshay and Flotta. Here again very considerable enthusiasm was aroused among large numbers of hearers.

In considering the impact of these tours various factors must be assessed bearing on the enthusiastic reception received by the missionaries. In the first place, the novelty of open-air preaching was both in Orkney and Shetland so unusual as to constitute a very strong attraction, particularly to the working classes. In the second place, the contrast between the direct and urgent appeals made by the missionaries and the possibly more prosaic addresses which the people were accustomed to hear in parish churches undoubtedly would make the former more attractive. The fact, too, that the missionaries visited all points, whereas in many places preaching normally was conducted in unattractive and ruined buildings at a great distance from many parishioners was a further point which must be kept in mind in assessing the dramatic results claimed by the tourists.

It must be remembered also that both of these tours were conducted during the summer months and at the period which normally was regarded by the islanders as a holiday season. Had they landed in November or February it is unlikely that they would have had much opportunity of reaching many of the population, who during the short days and bad weather of winter months would have been disinclined to venture forth to listen to even such a novel campaign.

The period of these tours was one of considerable apprehension.



In Great Britain the example of events in France was causing a wave of panic which spread throughout this country. On 3rd June, 1799, the General Assembly saw fit to publish a pastoral admonition to the people under their care. The first part of this refers to the happenings in France, but the second part strangely enough was directed against Haldane and his friends. "It is much to be lamented," ran the address, "that while we are assaulted by false principles imported to us from abroad there should of late have arisen among ourselves a set of men whose proceedings threaten no small disorder. We mean these who, assuming the name of missionaries from what they call the Society for Propagating the Gospel at Home, are at present going through the land acting as universal itinerant teachers, intruding themselves into parishes without any call, bringing together assemblies of people in the fields or in places not intended for public worship; where, pouring forth their loose harangues, they frequently take the liberty of censuring the doctrine or the character of the minister of the parish. In these giddy times, when the love of innovation so much prevails, listen to the word of truth and soberness, recollect the counsels and the practice of your fathers under a well-educated and regularly ordained ministry. (Signed) William Moodie, D.D., Moderator."

A further Act passed followed an overture from the Synods of Aberdeen and Angus and Mearns respecting Vagrant Teachers and Sunday Schools, Irreligion and Anarchy. The Act recited many Acts of the Scots Parliament back to 1567 claiming that it was unlawful for any person to keep a private school in Scotland without registration. It was pointed out that for a first offence such a person was liable on conviction to be imprisoned for six months and for a subsequent offence to be transported for life. The Assembly enjoined all Presbyteries to be diligent in exercising these powers and to get the assistance of the Procurator of the Church to carry on such processes of law as might appear to be necessary to stamp out these new and novel movements.<sup>1</sup>

#### FORTY YEARS ON

The result of the visits to Orkney and Shetland above described was the formation, principally in Shetland, of a considerable number of congregations or meetings. These were known variously as meeting places of Independents, Congregationalists or "Missionaries". The Congregational Union as known today did not exist until 1812 and then on a small scale, and therefore it is difficult to know exactly under what auspices these gatherings were founded. Fortunately there is available a fund of information regarding the churches formed on these lines and arising out

<sup>1</sup> *Acts of the General Assembly*, as above.

of the visits of Haldane, Aikman and Innes. This is to be found in the voluminous reports of the Commissioners on Religious Instruction published in 1839.

#### ORKNEY

In Orkney the movement had not taken root in the same way as in Shetland. Three congregations owning four churches then existed, as follows:

##### *Kirkwall*

This congregation totalled forty communicants, although at evening services as many as two to three hundred assembled. Most of these, however, were not formally associated with the church. (It is strange that even today of all the churches in Kirkwall the Congregational Church is the only one to have a larger evening than morning congregation.) In the Report, membership was stated to have been stationary for a considerable time and all but four members were of the working class. The Church, built in 1823-24, was a building above dwelling houses and had been so constructed in order to raise money from the house rents. Seat rents were 3/- per annum, very few were let, and the collections totalled only 5/- per Sabbath. Of the two ministers who conducted the services, one—the Reverend David Ramsay—received no stipend and his Assistant received one pound per week.

##### *Evie and Rendall*

This Church consisted of sixty members, all of the poor and working classes. The attenders were drawn from a wide area, including the islands of Gairsay and Rousay, so that the attendance varied very much, depending on the weather. The stipend was fifty pounds but most of this was received from the Congregational Union. Collections varied from one shilling to six shillings per week.

##### *Harrray*

The members of this congregation, formed in 1810, also were entirely drawn from the working classes. The chapel, built between 1818 and 1823, was sixty feet long and fitted with pews, a refinement not found in many of the churches in Shetland. Before the church was built the congregation worshipped during summer months in the stackyard of Langskaill farm and in the winter months in the barn. The members gathered from a wide area and the collection averaged only two shillings per Sabbath. This congregation also had a small place of worship in the parish of Sandwick, built prior to 1810 on the lands of Benzie Clett, where the minister preached from time to time. Each year Mr. Mason, the then minister, went on a preaching tour throughout the islands of Orkney which was understood

to be part of his duty. In this way the traditions of the Haldanes were continued. This congregation was advanced enough to have a library of religious books "open to all denominations at a charge of 4d. per year and to the poor gratis".

### SHETLAND

In Shetland, about ten churches and congregations existed, these being at:

#### *Unst*

In the north part of Unst a chapel had been built costing from forty to fifty pounds. The 16 to 18 members were charged annual seat rents of 6d. per head, surely the lowest such charge ever recorded. There was no weekly collection, an indication of the poverty of the people.

#### *Sullom, Northmavine*

This Church, established in 1810, was attended by twenty to thirty people when the services were conducted by a layman, but if a preacher officiated as many as two hundred were present. All were reported to be of the working class and the church, which measured 38 ft. by 14 ft., had a thatched roof which was only 6½ feet from the ground.

#### *Walls*

Here there was a minister, the Reverend Peter Peterson, whose usual audience numbered 170—all of the poor and working classes. This church was a superior building, having cost no less than £120, raised chiefly from persons of different denominations in Glasgow and Edinburgh. The average weekly collection was 1/6d. The minister told the Commissioners that he spent two months of each year preaching throughout the length and breadth of Shetland and delivering about six or seven sermons per week. Later in this paper an interesting account of one of these missionary journeys is given. (Appendix A).

#### *Foula*

There was a chapel on this remote island, where twenty communicants resided. Services were held each Sunday, usually being conducted by lay preachers. Mr. Peterson from Walls, however, visited Foula twice each year and preached a total of ten sermons annually.

#### *Quarff*

Here was an unusual feature, a joint Baptist and Independent Congregation. At the time of the Report a new chapel was in the course of erection, to cost fifty to sixty pounds. Mr. John Inglis officiated as "Speaker".



*Sandwick and Cunningsburgh*

Mr. Robert Smith, lay preacher, was located here. His average number of hearers was thirty—all of the working class. The congregation was declining and the attenders included a number of Baptists who themselves had no place of worship. The chapel cost thirty pounds when built in 1820 and of this small sum two-thirds was raised in other parts of Shetland. The preacher had no salary but performed public worship twice every Sunday as well as in the homes of the members alternating from one house to another.

*Sand*

In this parish, where the Reverend John Nicolson had been newly ordained, the church, established in 1828, had cost £70, of which £20 was still unpaid. The average attendance was 80 and here one member was reported as not belonging to the working class. Seat rents totalled £2 per annum and of the stipend of £30 the congregation raised only £8.

*Lerwick Congregational Church*

It appears that the origin of the Congregational Church at Lerwick was rather different from that of the other churches founded in Shetland.<sup>1</sup> About the time of the visit by the Haldanes there was a feeling of friction in the Church of Scotland at Lerwick. Three men—James Peterson, blacksmith, Peter Sieviewright, baker, and James Sinclair, mechanic—resigned as elders. Later, however, they withdrew altogether and formed a religious meeting where they met regularly for prayer and bible reading. They are said to have been the victims of public ridicule and persecution which extended almost to a cessation of orders in their respective businesses. Later that year the visit of Haldane and Innes took place and the Lerwick group received new spiritual stimulus and encouraging advice from the visitors. Shetland then received a visit from Mr. George Wright and Isaac Nichol on behalf of the "Society for the Promotion of the Gospel at Home". As many as two hundred people attended these preachings and this body became the first organised congregation of Dissenters in the town, although at the time of the Cromwellian occupation of the islands Cromwell's "Ironsides" had built a meeting house for themselves. The Lerwick congregation was one which developed from an entirely independent group so totally unacquainted with denominational peculiarities that they did not know what distinctive name to assume or with what body to unite. It was not until 1808 that they finally became formally a Congregational Church.

<sup>1</sup> *Scottish Congregational Magazine*, old series, October, 1858, etc.

In 1803 Mr. James Tulloch, a graduate from the Theological Academy in Glasgow, came to Shetland with a view to continuing the work commenced by Haldane in the district around Lerwick, and while engaged in this ministry he was seized by a press gang and hurried aboard a warship. He was later liberated through the intervention of friends.

The first settled pastor of this group was Mr. George Reid, and as it was extremely difficult in these days to get people from the South to ordain Mr. Reid and induct him the Shetland Congregationalists followed the practice which had been adopted at times by small separate groups of Presbyterians and, following a special service, the members themselves ordained the minister. Mr. Reid suffered certain hardships in the early years of his ministry. He was cursed and pelted with rotten eggs, decaying vegetables and snowballs and otherwise molested in the street. At night people also rattled the doors and windows of his house and one evening a fiddler was pressed to stand outside the door of the room where the service was then being held and as the worshippers were bowed in prayer he played the well known tune "De'il stick the Minister". This incident in itself ended the persecution, as the sympathy of all decent people came down strongly on the side of the Congregational organisation. This church differs from the others mentioned in respect that an organisation existed before the visit of Haldane and Innes to Shetland.

### *Reawick*

This district, situated 25 miles northwest of Lerwick, has a beautiful Congregational Church with seating capacity for 350 to 400 people. It originated between 1820 and 1830. The first settled pastor was appointed in 1842 and in 1900 the Church at Sand was united with it.

### *Whiteness*

During the ministry of Reverend Nicholson in Scalloway he took a great interest in the erection of a small church at Whiteness, about six miles northwest from Scalloway, where he preached one Sunday per month; going by small boat when the weather was suitable and walking at other times. When at the Congregational Assembly meetings he made a collection among friends for funds to build this chapel and raised eighty pounds. When going home to Shetland the steamer went ashore in dense fog and when the boats were lowered they were so leaky that they could not float. Fishing boats came from the village of Cove and took off the passengers. Shortly afterwards the vessel broke in two and some of the cargo was washed ashore, among which was Mr. Nicholson's chest which contained the money for building the chapel. It was restored to Mr.

Nicholson and after the bank notes had been carefully dried the Bank accepted them and they were put to their original purpose.<sup>1</sup>

A press report of the opening of this chapel reads:

*"Opening of a Chapel in Shetland"*

"A new chapel was opened for public worship in the parish of Whiteness in Shetland on the 28th December last, in connection with the Congregational Union of Scotland. On both services the house was so crowded that many had to go away for want of room. The circumstances under which this place of worship has been erected are somewhat singular; but it is thought unnecessary to make any statement of these matters here further than this—that the people in that locality, having been prevented from receiving religious instruction in the school-house of 'The Society for the propagation of Christian knowledge', formed and carried through the resolution of raising this house. When finished it is expected to accommodate about 200 persons. The walls, roof, door and windows have been so far completed that a shelter is afforded from all weathers, but nothing has been or can be done to the inside for want of funds. The present seating is a mere temporary construction and very uncomfortable, and it would be well if some kind friends were moved to afford assistance to finish the work.

"Whiteness is one of the stations connected with Mr. Nicholson's charge, but the chapel is always open to every credited Evangelical preacher, and it already has been occupied by our brethren of the Baptist, Methodist and Free Church connexions."

REV. DAVID RAMSAY

An early apostle of the Congregational Church in Orkney was the Reverend David Ramsay. Mr. Ramsay was born in 1780 at Barrie, Angus, and was brought up in comparatively easy circumstances. Originally a member of the Church of Scotland, he was interested by a preaching tour of Rowland Hill and the Haldanes in his native district. This increased Ramsay's interest in religion and he purchased copies of the Confession of Faith and other documents. The reading of the former altered Mr. Ramsay's opinions of the form of church government. He became a dissenter from the national church on account of its establishment. While still in his teens he went to Arbroath to become a weaver

<sup>1</sup> *Scottish Congregational Magazine*, old series, October 1858 etc., and information from R. C. Mowat, Esq., Rosebank, Scalloway.



and there joined the local Congregational Church. While there he decided to study for the Congregational ministry and attended Mr. Haldane's classes. After leaving the class and preaching for some time in Kirkin-tilloch and Greenock he came in 1807 to Kirkwall, where a Congregational Church had been formed a year before. Strangely enough the trustees were not all members of the church and interest on the debt still due pressed heavily on the new congregation. To raise money the chapel was let out to a company of actors; this caused Mr. Ramsay to leave the church and to rent a large room where those that adhered to him met for worship. In these early days the members were allowed to exhort at the closing of the forenoon services but later on Mr. Ramsay declared this as being one of the impediments to the early success of Congregationalism in Kirkwall and elsewhere; too many people attempted to speak on subjects on which they were not at all well informed.

The visit of the Haldanes had awakened the people and they were still vividly remembered in all parts of Orkney. In his early days Mr. Ramsay preached extensively in all parts of the mainland and in the islands. As previously stated the Kirkwall Congregation was composed of working people who were unable to provide Mr. Ramsay with a stipend. Accordingly, he commenced the manufacture of straw plaiting which for forty years supplied regular work for the women in the county. He was engaged in this employment all week but preached every Sunday in Kirkwall, the islands or in the country. This caused him considerable expense for horse and boat hire. Except in extreme cases it was necessary that he should return to Kirkwall to allow him to be at business on Monday morning and a memoir states that in many cases his necessary return was accompanied by "narrow escape from a watery grave".

Mr. Ramsay often has been stated to have introduced the straw plaiting industry to Orkney but it is fair to point out that in the New Statistical Account, under an article on the Parish of Birsay and Harray, it was stated to have been introduced by Mr. Robert Borwick of Kirkwall. The industry was very important in the Orkney economy and was principally concerned with the preparing of straw for hats and bonnets. Agents gave out the straw to the women to be manufactured in their own dwellings and according to their skill each could earn from 3d. to 9d. per day. The employment was extremely susceptible to the vagaries of fashion and changes of designs in the hats worn by the fashionable ladies of London had instant repercussions in the homes of the straw-plaiters of Orkney.

In 1815 the Reverend George Robertson went north to assist Mr. Ramsay. Mr. Robertson was an Orcadian, having been born at Tankerness

on 17th June, 1778. Going to Edinburgh in early life he fell under the influence of the Reverend Rowland Hill. Latterly, he entered the Haldanes' Theological Academy and was one of the first 24 students. It was customary each Sabbath for one to preach in Kirkwall and the other to go to the country or to the islands. This involved journeying over roads or tracks the conditions of which people in the south were totally unable to imagine: often it was necessary to travel 24 to 30 miles during the weekend. Returning from Harray one winter Sabbath evening, snow being on the ground, Mr. Ramsay's horse fell with him. He found that his leg was broken and that he could not walk. For a long time he lay on the ground, fearing that he might die there, for he was near no road and beyond the cry of any house. After a while, with great suffering, he managed to creep on his hands and knees to the house from which he had started. His recovery was tedious, but as soon as he was able to sit in a chair he was carried, chair and all, to the place of meeting and preached every week. After his recovery, however, Mr. Ramsay confined his services to the town of Kirkwall. In all Mr. Ramsay continued to officiate in Orkney for a period of 46 years until his death, which took place on 24th August, 1853. He was described as an original thinker with matured opinions. Outside his own congregation his advice was much sought after in Orkney by people of all classes. His feelings as a Christian were more sober than ecstatic. "His illustrations were singularly luminous but not always equally distinguished by good taste, and he was a popular preacher", says the writer of a brief biography.<sup>1</sup> It is interesting that Mr. Ramsay's name was still quoted during the period of my residence in Orkney although his death had taken place about a century earlier.

#### EVANGELICAL UNION CHURCH, SHAPINSAY

Of the ninety or so churches belonging to the Evangelical Union of Scotland only one was erected in Orkney. This church was built in 1850 in the island of Shapinsay and resulted from the efforts of a stone mason who then was helping to build Balfour Castle, which today as then is one of the finest mansions in the Orkneys.<sup>2</sup> This propagandist had brought some of the pamphlets on the atonement controversy with him from the south and circulated them in the island and among his fellow workers. The result was that "such a hungering and thirsting after the word was excited" that two Evangelical Union students were sent to Shapinsay and preached night after night. A church was formed and ground was granted

<sup>1</sup> Memoir of Mr. David Ramsay; *Scottish Congregational Magazine*, old series; MS. book kept by Kirkwall Congregational Church.

<sup>2</sup> Dr. Fergus Ferguson, *History of the Evangelical Union* (1876).

for the erection of the chapel by the proprietor of the island, J. Balfour, Esq. Shapinsay Church, with the other Evangelical Union congregations, joined the Congregational Union in 1896 and continued to meet until 1961. During part of my stay in Orkney the church was vacant and on many occasions I accompanied the Reverend J. R. McCorkindale of Kirkwall in the performance of his fortnightly "supply" of the Shapinsay Church. This meant a Sunday rendezvous on Kirkwall pier at 1.30 p.m. in all kinds of weather. Here a motor boat conveyed us to Shapinsay, six miles away, where a car was in waiting to take us a further three miles to the church. Prior to the service we were plied with tea and Orkney home baking. Mr. McCorkindale then conducted the worship, after which a further service of tea followed. We then retraced our journey by car and motor boat to arrive back on Kirkwall pier at 5 p.m. Despite its seeming proximity to the Orkney mainland one felt that one had paid a visit to some distant part quite different from the populated surroundings of Orkney's capital.

An interesting Pastor of this Shapinsay Church was the Reverend John Heggie, who ministered there from 1901 to 1902. Leaving Shapinsay, he later described himself as minister of the Congregational Church at Harray. It is understood, however, that he had received no call to this body but merely offered to act as pastor to the small number of adherents in return for the weekly collections and any donations. He also conducted services in the Sandwick Church. Later he was better known as a standard bearer of the "Wee Frees" in Orkney, following on a House of Lords Decision in 1905. Here he was concerned in barricading the United Free contingent from the former Birsay Free Church. This led to an action in Kirkwall Sheriff Court between Mr. Heggie and the Reverend Charles Meldrum of Birsay in which it was alleged that Mr. Meldrum had slandered Mr. Heggie. The Court, however, found in favour of the Defender.<sup>1</sup>

What must have been a major sorrow in the life of the Reverend David Ramsay of Kirkwall falls to be recorded. His son, David Ramsay, aged 14 years, in company with three other boys about the same age, was on 3rd August, 1838, standing at some of the booths beside Kirkwall Cathedral forming part of the Lammas Market. Here it was suggested that the lads go and steal some turnips from fields outside the town, and they set off together. Having taken the turnips the boys were in process of eating them by the roadside when another boy came along the road towards Kirkwall from Tankerness. On his passing, the Kirkwall boys for some reason pretended to be drunk but one of Ramsay's companions gripped the boy and later all four laid him down on the road and while holding

<sup>1</sup> Process, Heggie v. Meldrum, Kirkwall Sheriff Court.



him went through his pockets. From these they took some copper coins and also 4/6d. in silver, but on the boy pursuing them they all sat down together and returned the copper money. It was then suggested that the silver money had been left lying on the road and the assaulted boy returned to look for this. Later, however, it was alleged that Ramsay had kept a sixpence in his mouth, and other small sums of silver were in the possession of the others. All were arrested and charged on Indictment. The declarations of the accused have been shown to me by courtesy of Mr. Johnson, Depute Clerk of Justiciary. When examined by the Sheriff one of Ramsay's co-accused declared that he had attended the Grammar School at Kirkwall and that Mr. Craig, the teacher, was very particular in making all the boys learn their catechism, which they had to say every morning. He admitted to the Sheriff that he knew the answer to any question in the shorter catechism and that the eighth commandment was "Thou shalt not steal". For this offence, which today would have resulted in an appearance before the Juvenile Court, possibly followed by a short period of Probation, these four accused actually were charged with Highway Robbery and conveyed to the High Court at Edinburgh where each got the then lenient sentence of nine months' imprisonment. One can imagine the sad effect of these proceedings on the Reverend Mr. Ramsay, and the harm which possibly quite wrongly he would feel had been done to the Congregational cause in consequence.<sup>1</sup>

#### PRESENT POSITION REGARDING CHURCH BUILDINGS

In *Orkney* the Congregational Church now occupy a small but substantial building which was opened for public worship in November, 1876, at Palace Road, Kirkwall.

The church in *Harray*, it is sad to say, is now used for the purpose of housing deep litter hens.

In *Rendal*, too, the church survived until the 1951 gale and was used by the locals as a hall. During this notable incident in Orkney history, however, it was almost completely blown down and the materials were carried away for other purposes.

The *Shapinsay* Church building was closed for regular worship as recently as 1961. For some time before services had been conducted here regularly by the Church of Scotland minister on the island. Towards the end membership numbered forty but most were elderly and some had left the island. Only about a dozen or so attended during the last months.

<sup>1</sup> Records of the High Court of Justiciary.

The final meeting was held on Wednesday, 18th April, 1962, when an afternoon service was conducted by the Rev. Mr. Gordon of Kirkwall Congregational Church, an official from the Congregational Union, to close the Church officially. The buildings then reverted as in their Titles to the Balfour family of Shapinsay and were bought by a former member of the church who now lives in the manse but does not occupy the church. The proud boast of the earlier laird that the church would have so short a life that when it reverted to him he would stable his horses in it, therefore, was confounded, for the church continued to meet for over a century until the island was hit by depopulation like other parts of Orkney, and thus performed a long and useful Christian service.

*Sandwick Church.* This congregation had a chequered career having at times a minister, at times a missionary with long periods of vacancies in between. The church building remained in good condition until it was converted into a defence post, being on the east side of Skarabrae Aerodrome.

Services are remembered here as recently as 1912. The minister of Harray Congregational Church preached at Sandwick at 4 p.m. In winter people walking to the service carried oil lanterns with them to light their paths. A centenary service is remembered about 1910.

A lady still living, who has been contacted by me, remembers that her grandfather had helped to carry on horseback slates from the Black Craig, Stromness, from which the church roof was built.<sup>1</sup>

In *Shetland*<sup>2</sup> the position is that only the foundations are visible of the church built at Sullom in 1810. The new church, erected in 1865, is now in use by the Church of Scotland.

The same position applies in the island of *Foula*, where Congregational services ceased shortly after the first war.

In *Sandwick* the church building continues in use, having been bought from the Congregationalists in 1891 by the Free Church for the sum of £10; it therefore continues as the present United Free Church of Scotland. Although built in 1820 Title Deeds were not granted until 1838. The first worshippers here had applied for preachers to the Methodists and only when their request was ignored did they get in contact with the "Missionary Church" of the Congregationalists. This very primitive building had

<sup>1</sup> Information supplied by Mrs. Ida Garson, Sandwick, Orkney, and other local informants.

<sup>2</sup> Information for this section was gathered from many local informants—Church officials, Registrars, Schoolmasters, Postmasters, etc.

provision left in erection for the addition of a gallery which finally was done. The roof originally was of grey Shetland stone but about the beginning of the present century the stones were replaced by slates.

*Scalloway.* This church, erected in 1838, was raised by free labour, even women carrying sand and stones from the beach to assist at the work. A man, who died in 1920 at the age of 90, remembered as a young boy carrying baskets of pigs' bristles to mix with lime to provide plaster for the walls.

A description of this church shows the comforts or lack of these in such early buildings. The seats were wooden planks, placed on trestles, on top of an earthen floor which was sprinkled with sand. Stones were left projecting from the walls for the purpose of adding a gallery if this ever was required.

*Walls.* Extensive inquiry in Walls has revealed that the first small church was on the same site as the later one built about 1820. Local tradition still tells that when this second church was opened there was a surplus of funds and the people were given a free soiree which apparently was much enjoyed by all, as it is mentioned even today by two separate people who heard of this from people born about this time (1848). The new church also had an earthen floor but was fitted with a gallery, unusual at this period. Prior to the building of either church, services were held at Burrastow, Walls, and it is known in the traditions of one local family that the great grandmother, born in 1818, went to the services there as a little girl. Later on these were held in a house at West Shore, the walls of which still are standing. Walls Church today, however, closed in 1965 and presently is advertised for sale.

*Sandness.* The church here now is used for the necessary but humble function of post office and grocery store.

*Whiteness.* This church is still standing but is no longer used. When open, one sermon per month was preached by the minister from Scalloway. An interesting reflection on Shetland travel is that when the weather was fine he proceeded by small boat but only in bad weather did he walk.

The church at *Sand* later was united to the congregation of Reawick and the church building here is believed still to stand unoccupied.

So far as the congregation of *Billister* is concerned this has completely fallen out of local memory. Extensive inquiries in the area have revealed no knowledge or trace of the former chapel and this was the only instance in which my inquiries, raised so many years later, have met with a complete blank. It is a great tribute to Messrs. Haldane and Innes that practically



every one of the persons written to by me in Shetland, most of whom were local Registrars, recalled in 1966 the famous visit paid by these missionaries to these northern islands as far back as one hundred and sixty-seven years ago.

#### A LEGAL COMPLICATION

An interesting complication arose regarding the former church in Mill Street and at one time occupied by the Congregational Church at Kirkwall before moving to their present place of worship in 1876. The church was sold in 1875 to local Templars' Lodges. At this time the Good Templar Movement was growing throughout Orkney. In fact, at one time as many as forty lodges existed in the islands. When the church was sold by the Congregationalists it was thought that Good Templarism would last forever, and accordingly, the original title deeds stated that if ever the body came to an end in Orkney the premises were to be conveyed to Trustees consisting of magistrates of the burgh, representatives of other Temperance bodies in the town and "such ministers of the Gospel in Kirkwall as may be pledged total abstainers". At the end of the recent war Good Templarism came to an end, but without formal dissolution. The body of Trustees named who were according to the title deeds merely to hold the hall till the revival of Templarism now assumed possession and it is to be noted that the only pledged abstainer amongst the Kirkwall Ministers was the Reverend Thomas B. Gordon of the Congregational Church. The hall has been the subject of two separate petitions to the Court of Session and finally the Court varied the Trust and conveyed the subjects to the Burgh of Kirkwall who are converting the building into a civic theatre.<sup>1</sup>

A review of the early Congregational activities in the islands of Orkney and Shetland and the subsequent history indicates certain very definite conclusions. It is true that the original appearance of these gentlemen missionaries from the south in their campaign attracted thousands from various motives. These would include the novelty of Evangelical preaching to the working classes, mere curiosity and the fact that in the summer months the attendance at the meetings would provide a pastime usually not available. When allowance is made for these features there must also have been a considerable spiritual quality which accompanied the movement. Many ordinary fishermen and crofters felt that at last persons of education were prepared to treat them and their humble life with seriousness and respect. This in itself must have seemed a great contrast to the

<sup>1</sup> Court of Session; Closed Record, Petition by Robert Marr and others, 1960; Archibald Macwhirter, *Good Templars in Orkney* (Kirkwall, 1951).

apparent indifference of many of the parish ministers. The figures collected regarding the position of the churches in 1837-38 show that the movement had remained very much one related to the poorer classes. Their original attachment and continued adherence to the Congregational Church probably was an appreciation of the interest which had been taken in humble people like themselves. The fact that the Methodist Church at a later date obtained a substantial footing in Shetland probably also was the outcome of the readiness of the pioneer Congregationalists to travel the country proclaiming the Gospel not only in church buildings but wherever an opportunity arose. The continuance of Congregationalism at towns like Kirkwall and Lerwick today possibly has been contributed to by the fact that over the generations incoming Congregationalists would settle in these towns.

The only other churches remaining are at Reawick and Scalloway in Shetland. The first of these is under the superintendence of a minister from Lerwick and in the latter a weekly service is conducted by a layman.

The beaches, barns and market places of Orkney and Shetland no longer resound to the earnest voices of the Evangelists exhorting their hearers to the accompaniment of the cry of sea birds overhead. Surely, however, some of the impact of these happenings of a century and a half ago has lingered in the traditions of the islands. The sudden arousing of many must have left its stamp in faithful living and contributed to the corporate characteristics of those who were not apathetic or indifferent. The word preached in the noble surroundings of these campaigns would not return void.

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## APPENDIX A

### PREACHING TOUR IN SHETLAND

*(Letter from the Rev. P. Peterson)*

Vadlure, 20 July, 1853

MY DEAR BROTHER,

I wrote you from Unst on the 28th ult. On the following day I preached in a district of that large and populous island, known by the name of Burrafirth. The meeting was well attended, especially considering that it had rained heavily all the day. I was warmly urged to visit them again, which it is not very likely I shall ever be able to do. On the 30th, I left the North Parish, having preached five times in it, and performed several other religious services, walked all the length of the Isle, making

several calls in the Mid Parish, till I reached Snaravoe, crossed Bloomel Sound, which separates Unst from the still larger island of Yell, and was kindly received by the family of Culivoe in North Yell. I remained here from Thursday evening till Monday, and preached on Friday, Saturday, and twice on Sabbath to such congregations as might have been expected under the circumstances of the case in other respects, and having no chapel to collect the people in, while the state of the weather on Sabbath forbade outdoor preaching. On the Monday I proceeded to the southward as far as Midyell, a distance of eight miles. I was here favoured with the use of an excellent pony belonging to a kind friend, and much enjoyed my ride over a fine level road, made about two years ago under the superintendence of Capt Craigie, R.N., as employed by the "Edinburgh section of the Central Board for relief of Highland Destitution". In the evening I preached at Seafeld, Midyell, to a pretty large audience, mostly women, some of whose hearts I trust were open to attend to the things which were spoken from the word of the Lord, to which they listened, in some cases, with tears stealing down their cheeks. Next day I walked to Ulsta, the nearest point to the Mainland, and distant from Midyell, by the line of road I followed, about 10 miles—crossed the broad and dangerous sound to Delting. When thus crossing Yell sound in a boat of about 12 feet keel, managed by an old man and two boys, we passed pretty near to the Isle of Samphray, on which reside three or four families, the males of which together with a young woman had a few months ago met a wattery grave, near to their own shore, when returning home from the Mainland. Such I was told had been the fate of most heads of families who had ever lived on the island.

After landing on the Delting side, I pursued my journey partly by land and partly by water, till I reached Sullam, when I had the pleasure of finding my friends well. I also found there my daughter from Foula, and her children. She had not before been on the Mainland since 1849, when she married and settled in that isolated spot in the Western Ocean. Her husband had been supplying for me in Wall, &c., and they are still with us.

On Wednesday the 6th instant, I reached home at a late hour in good health and spirits, although somewhat worn out with incessant walking and preaching: felt thankful that I had been able to accomplish this tour with satisfaction to myself, and with profit I trust to others. In the evening, last Sabbath, I preached in the parish church of Papa, a place which, owing to the dangerous Sound which separates it from Sandness, I can too seldom visit. During the previous week the people here had had several addresses from a Mormonite preacher, who is at present making a tour of



the Shetland Isles, urging his vagaries on the attention of the people, with a degree of earnestness and zeal worthy of a better cause. The people are, I trust, in general too well acquainted with their Bibles to be duped by such absurdities. This is the first preacher belonging to the "Latter Day Saints" who has ever trode on Shetland soil, and his success will I expect be such as will afford little encouragement for others to follow in his train.

I am, my dear brother,

Yours very truly,

P. PETERSON.

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## APPENDIX B

### MINISTERIAL LIFE IN SHETLAND IN THE 1850's

"No man who has not his heart in the work was fitted for occupying the position of a Shetland Congregational Minister. Physical strength was needed for the work, but moral energy, or rather spiritual life and power, must distinguish the man who is called to pursue his labours in weariness and painfulness, in journeyings often, in cold and rain, in storm and darkness. But there is a blessedness in such service which they only who engage in it know, and they have God's blessing evidently resting upon them. The Sabbath-day congregations at all the stations are as good as can be wished, for the chapels are in general quite full, and in most places when I collect the people together on week days in cottage houses or rather in what you would call huts, the attendance is very encouraging, and in such cases part of the audience always consists of persons who from some cause or other, are never seen in places of worship on Sabbath days, and therefore it is of the more importance to bring the gospel to them in this way. Sabbath before last I preached at Sand in the forenoon and in Reawick in the evening. The Lord's Supper was observed in the former place, in the presence of a considerable number of spectators, several of whom appeared to be affected. On Monday evening we had a missionary meeting in Mr. Stout's schoolroom at Reawick. The weather happened to be very rough and consequently the attendance was not so good as otherwise would have been the case. The collection, however, was far beyond expectation, especially as the Wesleyans about a fortnight before had had a meeting in the same place, of the same nature, for their Missionary Society. On Tuesday I left Reawick for Westerskeld where I had intimated a sermon for that day and where I was met by a marriage party, for whom I performed the ceremony in the presence of the congregation. As the

evening was threatening to be very violent, and I had several miles to walk and then to cross an arm of the sea before I got home, I got brother Nicolson, who had come as a hearer, to preach to the people while I pursued my journey westward. On my way from Reawick to Skeld I overtook "an old disciple", in his 89th year, who had attended the meetings on Sabbath and Monday evenings. His mind had first been seriously impressed when Mr. James Haldane was in Shetland upwards of 53 years ago; and chiefly by reading one of the tracts circulated by him and Dr. Innes on that memorable occasion. On the road from Reawick to Skeld I attended to a family baptism. I had other two children to baptize in the same neighbourhood but the day was too cold to allow of infants being carried out, and circumstances would not permit me to have so many separate services."

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(*Old Series*)

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#### APPENDIX C

### SOIREE AND PRESENTATION

"On the evening of Friday the 7th March, 1851, Mr. Peterson, pastor of the Independent Church, Walls, treated the young people and children belonging to his Bible Class and Sabbath School to a soiree in the chapel, on the occasion of his presenting to them a circulating library, furnished by some of Mr. Peterson's personal friends connected with Rose Street U.P. Church, Edinburgh. The library consists of upwards of 200 volumes, published by the London Religious Tract Society, and at the Catalogue price worth £13. After praise an appropriate prayer, offered up by Mr. Findley, Wesleyan Minister, and a service of tea, which was evidently much relished. Mr. Peterson, who, of course, presided, rose up and exhibited in his hands a few volumes as specimens of the library presented to, and for the use of, his young people, said that the duty thus devolving upon him to present such a valuable gift to his Bible class, and to the Sabbath School, he felt in all respects to be a pleasant one. Because this invaluable boon was conferred by Christian friends belonging to a different section of the Church of God, and, therefore, a pleasant exhibition of Christian liberality. The Senior Sabbath School teacher then gave an address to the scholars, and dwelt in an interesting manner on the privileges of the young in the present day."

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